PEAKS OF SHALA

796 children and half the men of the village knelt on the cold floor, and their rain-drenched garments, threadbare and patched, made pools of water about their knees. The rain was still pouring down, as undiminished as a river, and the sound of it and of the waterfalls filled the chill place.

Padre Marjan began the mass, his high Albanian voice chanting the Latin, and the congregation made the responses in the same tongue. A ragged, barefooted man came to swing the censer for the padre, and Perolli, in his neat English tweeds, revolver and knife swinging at the belt, also assisted, going behind the altar with the padre to help him put a brocaded robe over the brown one, and reverently handing the cup and the wine. Rexh, in his red Mohammedan fez, watched it all with serious eyes, his head around the edge of the doorway.

851 After mass the padre dashed upstairs to look at our cooking dinner, and hastened down again for a christening. I am not familiar with Catholic ceremonial, but nothing could have been more touching than Padre Marjan, thin, worn by fasting and work, barefooted, the edge of his brown robe showing below the front hem of a white cotton garment, bringing into the arms of the Church the tiny, wrinkled infant strapped in its painted cradle. The woman who held it looked at him with a sort of apprehensive anxiety; the crowd pressed informally around them. Every time the padre turned to fetch the little glass bottle of oil, or the tin can of holy

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water, or the square of crocheted cotton lace that he laid over the cradle, the packed bodies gave way for him, and one child or another picked up the end of his trailing robe to keep it from beneath muddy, bare feet. 851

At the end, "Is it a boy or a girl?" he asked.

"A girl," the woman whispered. And the padre ended his solemn words with the name, "Regina."

The woman sighed and her tenseness relaxed. It must have been a great moment for the mother, I thought; some one said that she had carried the cradle forty miles over the mountains for this christening. We did want to give the baby something; for the hundredth time we regretted not having brought presents, and a hurried ransacking of all our possessions produced only a little colored sport handkerchief. But when we gave it to the baby it was as though we had presented a golden bowl; the excitement, the passing from hand to hand, the reverent marveling over such weaving, such color!

We found Perolli upstairs in the kitchen, grinning to himself, and when we asked him why, he said the christening was a joke on the padre. The woman was not the child's mother; the real mother, married by Albanian custom, had not yet got around to having the church ceremony, and the priest in the village forty miles away had refused to christen the child until the parents were married by the Church. But the devout neighbor, knowing that the infant was in danger

of hell fire, had brought it over the mountains and had it christened as her own, and Padre Marjan, all unsuspecting, had performed the ceremony.

Not half an hour later an almost naked man, streaming with rain as though he had swum the forty miles, appeared, breathless, with a water-soaked note from the other priest, and Padre Marjan read it aghast. "Merely parochial business," he said, tucking it in his belt and bending over the bubbling pots in the fireplace to taste and season. But his brown face remained wrinkled with worry.

A matter far more serious distracted attention from this complication in Church affairs, for Perolli, taking me aside, said to me: "You say you love the Albanians and the Albanian mountains. Do you want to stay here?"

"I'd love to stay here for years," I said. "It's the most beautiful country I've ever seen, and the most interesting people. But I can't, of course. Why?"

"Because you can, if you really do want to," said he. "I have a proposal of marriage for you."

"What!" said I. "You're joking!"

"Not at all," said Perolli, indignantly. "Do you think marriage is a thing to joke about?"

"But I never know what you mean," I complained. "And why should anyone want to marry me, here?"

"You needn't take it as a compliment to your

1 [Sec. to the Minister of the Interior -- Analyst] [206] 2 [Author -- Analyst]

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missionaries were surprised to find that Catholic priests in Albania baptized male children of the Turks (that is, Moslems) solely because of a superstition; "Solo per alcune superstitioni." (1)

1. J. Radonich, op. cit., p. 103

Another report, bearing a somewhat later date (1646), by the vice-prefect of the mission in Albania, Fra Gregoria Romano Trassini, states that children of Moslems baptized by Christian priests, later on live as "Turks." (2) Toma Tomichich, Archbishop of Skoplje,

2. Ibidem, p. 116

in 1755 in his report to the Congregation 'de propaganda fide' in Rome, speaks of baptism of children of the "Dvoverci" in his diocese. He also states that real "Turks" (that is, Moslems who seem more probably to have been Albanians, rather than Turks - M. S. F.), frequently used to invite Catholic priests to baptize their male children because they were convinced that if the children were baptized, then a witch would not devour them ("Accio le streghe non mangino i loro figlioli"/" In order that witches do not devour their children"/). (3) Finally, we have a report from

3. Ibidem, pp 641-642.

the middle of the nineteenth century that the Albanian Moslems used to have their children baptized in order to cure them of illness, but that the Catholic priests were forbidden to perform such baptisms. (4)

4. G. v. Hahn, "Albanesische Studien" (Jena, 1854), p. 38.

A. 608 851 Not only in Hahn's time, but even today there are among the Albanian Moslems those who have been baptized; today, however, there are fewer of these than at an earlier time. Among the Albanian Moslems, and especially among the Moslem gypsies in the area of Preshovo and Buianovci, there is a custom in families where child mortality is high, to place a newborn baby out on the road. If the first man to find the child is a Moslem, he takes the baby, and accepts and performs the "shishano kumstvo." (a colloquialism, meaning an incomplete performance of the ritual of a godfather) /122/ If the first one to find the baby is a Christian, he becomes the baby's godfather at the baptism

performed according to the Orthodox ritual. Such a Moslem child, after he grows up, customarily goes to church, and holds great esteem for his godfather. Thus is the case, for example, of an Albanian whose first name is Nenad, living in the village of Moravica (1948).

There are not as many first-hand and precise reports about baptized Moslems whose mother tongue is Serbian. This, however, does not mean that these Moslems resorted to such baptism to a lesser extent than other Moslems. The scarcity of reports is due only to the fact that there are generally fewer written records about the people's life in earlier periods in the regions where they lived.

During 1623 and 1624, Peter Masarech (from 1624 on he was bishop of Prizren), papal visitor, traveled through the Balkan countries. He submitted an exhaustive report about his travels, in which he answered the fifty-four questions asked in the instructions given him by the Congregation 'de propaganda fide'. In answer to question number twenty-four, Masarech asserts that Bosnian Franciscans baptized "Turkish" children, not because they, the Franciscans, were superstitious, but because of the superstitions of the parents who had their children baptized in order that such children would have good fortune, be victorious in battle, and would escape misfortune, fears, evil spirits, and similar calamities. In certain localities children were baptized by coercion. (1)

1. K. Draganovich, "Izvješće apostolskog vizitatora Petra Masarechija o prilikama kat. naroda u Bugarskoj, Srbiji, Srijemu, Slavoniji i Bosni, g. 1623 i 1624." /"Report by Peter Masarech, apostolic visitor, on the conditions of the Catholic population in Bulgaria, Serbia, Srem, Slavonia, and Bosnia, in 1623 and 1624"/, Starine, XXXIX (Zagreb, 1938), p. 14.

At that time the Bosnian Franciscans performed priestly functions not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also in Slavonia, those parts of Hungary which were under the Turks, and in Belgrade. The above report, therefore, can be accepted as valid not only for Bosnia alone, but also for the above mentioned regions.

There is one special example which has been preserved in a folk poem. Two variants of this poem about Kushtrim Vasoievich were published ten years ago. According to the first